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THE BACKLOG FIRE.

I'm in for progress and all that,
Nor with a scientist would spat
Unless he should arouse my ire
By sneezing at the backlog fire.

None ever prized improvements more
Than I do—when they save a "chore"—
But let none of 'em dare aspire
To get beyond a backlog fire.

The hotel "lift" and pyroscaph,
The engine and the telegraph—
These works I praise of steam and wire,
But also, please, the backlog fire.

The phonograph and autophone—
All Edison's electric zone—
Are welcome if they don't conspire
Against the rare old backlog fire.

Your patent heaters, low down grates
And oil stoves make not rueful mates,
But when I tune my golden lyre
I'll sing about the backlog fire.

Fashion's votaries flutter roun.
The register when "teas" abound;
They favor not the meek attire
That best befits a backlog fire.

Ices and bonbons, fancy fruit
And dainty cigarettes to boot
Are apt to wear an aspect dire
If served beside a backlog fire.

But if a tale you like to hear,
Crack nuts, eat apples, make good cheer.
Then have the crown of all desire—
A blazing, roaring backlog fire.
—William Struthers in Detroit Free Press.

HER COMPLEXION.

Mrs. Redmayne was decidedly pretty. She dressed well and was very careful in wearing only the colors that suited her. She was a fragile, delicate looking little woman and affected half lights, like a rare fern; the strong sunlight with its fierce glare did not suit her. Her little drawing room—"my little nest," as she used to call it—was shaded by heavy lace curtains; stained glass, Japanese screens and a thousand and one pretty things, each interesting and beautiful in its way, were crammed into it; but not one of the pretty trifles was half so interesting and beautiful as pretty little Mrs. Redmayne herself.

She was a pathetic creature, too, doubly fascinating, doubly dangerous, when narrating the troubles and trials she had experienced during her married life, and with her troubles and trials she was accustomed to entertain her numerous adorers in the drawing room of her little bijou residence in Blank street, Mayfair. There was something almost intoxicating in the heavy odor of sandalwood and potpourri mixed which pervaded the apartment.

Mrs. Redmayne herself, like most eminent consulting physicians, never received more than one patient at a time. Her visitors were all men—not that there was anything shady about Mrs. Redmayne, but she did not encourage lady callers. She invited a few female intimates to dinner, but she took very good care that those ladies whom she distinguished by her friendship should be good talkers and at all events plain enough to act as foils.

The real fact is that Mrs. Redmayne had married the justice because he was reputed to be a very wealthy man, and Cissy Redmayne herself, as a girl, had known all the real bitterness of poverty, being a poor curate's daughter. Justice Redmayne's income was very large when he married the pauper curate's only child. Though he was 60, and an experienced man of the world, it was purely a love match on his side. Till she was 17 Miss Cissy had dreamed of pretty frocks and a pretty house, of good living, of an endless succession of balls and entertainments and of the public recognition of her own beauty.

In marrying Justice Redmayne she secured all these things and escaped from cold mutton and penury. But the justice, though he fondly loved his pocket Venus of a wife, loved old port wine still better, and after 10 years of happiness the justice fell a victim to his favorite poison and left Cissy £5,000 in hard cash and the freehold of the little house in Mayfair. And then Mrs. Redmayne made the following simple calculation, "I can live at the rate of £3,000 a year for three years, somebody worth having will marry me in that time, and if I fail to find the somebody I must throw up the game and go back to papa and cold mutton."

From this it will be seen that pretty Mrs. Redmayne was a practical minded little woman. She had been quite right. Several somebodies and a good many nobodies had paid her a great deal of attention, but not one of the somebodies got half so much encouragement as Lieutenant and Captain Strongithearm of her majesty's Carpet Warriors. To be a Carpet Warrior nowadays needs a considerable deal of money, blood or interest; Jack Strongithearm had money and interest too.

He was a fool, but the mere fact of his being a fool by no means disqualified him for the Carpet Warriors. They have their own special club, where they drink magnums of costly dark and peculiarly dry champagne for lunch; they play whist there on an afternoon and baccarat, nap and marmora until the small hours of the morning, and a good deal of money changes hands. As a rule, save for the wealthy, three years as a Carpet Warrior is seldom exceeded—a man either marries, exchanges into a cheaper regiment or bursts up. It is a short life and a merry one, and it is a very great privilege indeed to be a Carpet Warrior at all.

Now, Lieutenant and Captain Strongithearm, being wealthy, was quite a veteran among the Warriors; he had been 10 years in the regiment, and he was deservedly looked up to by his brother officers as a connoisseur and judge of beauty. He was very critical and terribly hard to please. He it was who had blasted the chances of Lady Dorothy Fitz-Urse when he gave her the nickname of "Dolly the Dairymaid" and likened her lovely pink and white complexion to strawberries and cream. [illegible] had been the [illegible] laid by wily mothers for that too wary bird, Captain Strongithearm, but no one, till he met Mrs. Redmayne, had succeeded in putting salt upon his tail. But Strongithearm was very far gone indeed upon the wide

Twice during the justice's lifetime had he solemnly entreated her to fly with him. On the first occasion she had simply replied, "If you were not so terribly tall, I'd box your ears." The second time he had been shown the door and Justice Redmayne's wife had cut him for a whole month. Nothing increases a man's affection like a real good snubbing, and Captain Strongithearm, now she was a widow, not only fervently loved Mrs. Redmayne—he actually reverenced her. He assiduously paid her court. He was never tired of dancing attendance upon the little widow, and he praised her till his brother officers were sick of her very name. And now he was her accepted lover, and although their marriage was not announced it was tacitly understood.

Strongithearm had but one failing; he smoked morning, noon and night. It was a real grievance to him that the queen's regulations did not allow him to smoke on parade. Now, Mrs. Redmayne hated tobacco, and ever since his courtship Strongithearm had become a non-smoker for her dear sake. It was a severe penance to him, but he bore it like a man; he suffered in silence and never complained.

But one fatal afternoon Strongithearm was tempted and Strongithearm fell. A very exalted personage, indeed, was accustomed occasionally to drop into the Warriors' club. Once inside its exclusive walls the exalted personage used to unbend and become very much like an ordinary mortal. His proceedings were always exactly the same. He would take up his position in front of the fire or at the window, according to the season of the year, order a brandy and soda, pull out his cigar case and politely offer a cigar to one of the Warriors, and then for the next half hour the distinguished personage was but an ordinary member of the club. But there is an etiquette even in little things.

No one had ever been known to refuse to smoke the offered regalia—it was a kind of royal command which could not be disobeyed—and so it happened that Strongithearm, who had been innocently sitting at the window waiting for Mrs. Redmayne's little victoria to pass found himself the recipient of the royal bounty in the shape of a very dark looking Havana of exquisite flavor. There was nothing for it. The captain lighted up with a smile and a groan, and all the other Warriors envied him his luck, and then he and the distinguished personage continued to stare out of the window and criticise the passersby.

They had not been three minutes there when the little victoria flashed past, with its cockaded coachman and its pair of fiery chestnuts. The big pink sunshade was tilted on one side, and pretty little Mrs. Redmayne looked up at the window and smiled. Then Strongithearm blushed to his ears and returned her salute, as did the distinguished personage at his side.

"I fancy that bow was meant for you. You're a lucky fellow, Captain Strongithearm. Ahem! Who is she?"

Strongithearm would have liked to lie to him, but that unfortunately is contrary to etiquette. "Widow of Justice Redmayne," he replied. "At least I believe so."

"Seemed to know one of us at all events," said the distinguished personage. "Splendid complexion. Wonder if it is her own?"

"Oh, it's perfectly genuine," blurted out Strongithearm, and then he felt that he had made an ass of himself.

The president of the Warriors' club (he was likewise the titular colonel of the regiment) looked annoyed. He did not say anything, however, but went on calmly fumigating himself and Captain Strongithearm. Strongithearm would have bolted if he had dared, but the stern, unwritten law of tyrant custom forbade it.

"I wonder whether her complexion would stand the clove test," said the distinguished personage. "It's a wonderful thing, that clove test," he continued, with the air of one about to impart a scientific fact. "You know the clove test, Captain Strongithearn?"

The distinguished personage, like the rest of his family, hardly ever forgets a name.

"Can't say I do, your"——

"Not know the clove test? I've known it ever since I was a boy!" burst in the other. "It's an invaluable thing to know—an infallible test. You get a clove, you know, and you've only got to get near enough to the suspected cheek—and that's not generally so very difficult, by gad!—and just to breathe upon it, and if it's paint it turns black at once."

And there was instantly a chorus of testimony to the truth of the distinguished personage's assertion from the Warriors present.

"You don't seem to be getting on with that weed," continued the Distinguished Personage; "try another," and out came the hospitable cigar case.

There was nothing for it. "To hear is to obey" is in London as solemn a duty as at the sublime porte. Strongithearm accepted the cigar, and this time took good care not to let it go out. The conversation then became general, and the distinguished personage having turned his back for an instant, Captain Strongithearm seized the opportunity to make his escape.

And as he went down the stairs of the Warriors' club his soul was tortured by unworthy suspicions. Was it possible that Cissy Redmayne's complexion was not her own? "At any rate," thought the captain to himself, "I'll get some cloves. It'll take the beastly smell of the smoke away anyhow." And he went into the nearest chemists and made his purchase. Then he had his hair brushed at Douglas' and was vaporized with strong odors, and he bought a squeezer of "The Exclusive Bouquet" from the young lady with the ringlets, and then he jumped into a cab and drove straight to Mayfair, and in the cab he deodorized his garments to the best of his ability with the pungent perfume and munched away at his packet of cloves.

The captain was not unexpected. There was pretty little Mrs. Redmayne in a very low chair indeed, her little Dresden tea equipage upon a toy tea table of bamboo plush and embroidery. There were only two teacups, so the captain must certainly have been expected.

Never had Cissy Redmayne looked so charming. A crimson satin tea gown would be trying to most women, but the tea gown and the old lace with which it was trimmed suited Cissy Redmayne's blond beauty, and as he gazed at her with a lover's eyes the enamored captain swore to himself that he had never seen so pretty a picture as that formed by Cissy and her artistic surroundings. The heavy odor of sandalwood seemed to act like an intoxicant to the gallant officer, and when the little Louis Quinze shoe, with it coral buckle, was innocently protruded the captain felt that he was the luckiest of men.

"You hardly noticed me, Captain Strongithearm," said Mrs. Redmayne, with a little pout, "when I passed the club windows this afternoon. I can quite understand it. I recognized him at once. I could see the people taking off their hats a hundred yards off. Oh, Jack, how I envied you!"

"So did he, I think, when you bowed," he replied, with a smile.

"You're quite a classic Warrior today, Captain Strongithearm. How you've scented yourself! I've been reading 'The Last Days of Pompeii,' and I know that they went in for it tremendously in those days. Why, you're 'perfumed like a milliner,' as Shakespeare—or was it Bacon?—says. You needn't stroke my hand as if it were a kitten. What a very curious perfume, Captain Jack!"

"The fact is, Cissy, that he who must be obeyed always drinks gin and cloves of an afternoon."

When a Carpet Warrior stoops to a lie, he prefers to use a good large one.

"I like him for that," she said; "there's a touching humility about it that I admire."

"Yes, and of course we all have to do the same—out of tumblers, you know, no heel taps," said Strongithearm, expanding his lie as if it were a concertina. "Now let's talk about ourselves," he said affectionately. "Cissy, dear, why should we shilly shally any longer? I'm not eloquent, Cissy."

"Don't talk of eloquence," said Mrs. Redmayne petulantly. "The poor justice lived by it, and I know exactly what it's worth," and she drew her lace handkerchief across her eyes as a tribute to the memory of the departed.

"I'm a plain man," continued the captain as he expanded his mighty chest.

"You're the only person who thinks so," said Mrs. Redmayne, with a little purr of pleased proprietorship.

"Awfully good of you, I'm sure," said the captain. "You don't help a fellow a bit, Cissy. What I wanted to say was"—and the traitor slid his chair close to hers, keeping tight hold of her hand all the time. "I'll whisper it, Cissy," he said, and his voice trembled in its excitement.

The poor little woman turned her cheek toward him. She thought the wretch was going to kiss her, and she was nothing loth. Such innocent familiarities are very dear to engaged persons. A smile of anticipatory pleasure stole over her countenance as she felt his hot breath upon her cheek. And then she gave a little scream of terror as he suddenly dropped her hand with a military objurgation.

"Cissy—Mrs. Redmayne," he exclaimed. "Good heavens," and then he became scarlet in his indignation.

"Captain Strongithearm," said Mrs. Redmayne severely as she rose to her feet in mingled astonishment and terror, "you ought not to have come here. You've been drinking. Don't deny it, Jack," she added excitedly; "you look exactly like poor old Redmayne used to look when he returned from the monthly dinners. But Justice Redmayne drank port wine, like a gentleman; he didn't fuddle himself with gin and cloves."

"I haven't been drinking, Mrs. Redmayne. Farewell, Cissy," he added tragically; "we shall never meet again, except in society. Look in your glass, unhappy woman, and you will learn the dreadful truth. Farewell forever!" and seizing his hat he rushed from the room.

Mrs. Redmayne turned in astonishment to the mirror. What could those terrible words mean? Alas! one side of her face was covered by a hideous, smutty looking discoloration. Little Mrs. Redmayne gave an eldritch scream and fell fainting in a heap on the white bearskin hearth rug.

He never told her secret, for Jack Strongithearm was a gentleman. Pretty little Mrs. Redmayne had played her cards and lost the game. Within the twelvemonth the brokers were in the little bijou house in Mayfair, and Cissy Redmayne returned to her papa, the curate, and the cold mutton. She does a great deal of good in the parish and is a pretty, soft eyed little woman still, a trifle pale perhaps, for she never seeks to paint the lily now, knowing as she does that the clove test is infallible.—C. J. Wills in Argonaut.

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NOTICE.

I HAVE APPOINTED T. J. OSBORNE AS my Agent, to act during my absence, and to him all debts, etc., due me are to be paid.
A. MARDION.
Dated Pioche, Nevada, Oct. 10, 1892.